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# TOURIST SATISFACTION WITH ISLAND DESTINATIONS: AN INVESTIGATION ON VISITORS TO THE IONIAN ISLANDS, GREECE

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*Tourist satisfaction is the most important component in the analysis of tourism behavior, since it affects the choice of destination and the purchase of products, as well as the potential decision of the tourist to revisit the destination. The purpose of this paper is to examine the satisfaction of tourists visiting the Ionian Islands in*

*Greece, by use of quantitative methods that capture the factors influencing the satisfaction of tourists and their desire to repeat the visit, their relationship and consideration of the causes that shape tourism behavior. Research results reveal factors that affect tourist satisfaction, the relationships among these factors, the relationship between satisfaction and revisit to destination, the assessment of satisfaction by segmentation of tourists with regard to their motivation, the usability of information in satisfaction and the effect of tourism experience in travel behavior. The tourism policy recommendations arising from the research results will contribute to the diversification and enrichment of the tourism product, while also to a further enhancement in the satisfaction of tourists visiting the Ionian Islands.*

**Keywords:** *Tourist Satisfaction, Loyalty, Destination, Ionian Islands*

## INRODUCTION

Tourism is widely acknowledged as one of the most dynamic and largest sectors in the world economy, the second fastest growing global industry, and one of the strongest drivers of global economic growth (WTTC, 2019), with significant impacts across world economies in terms of employment generation and contribution to national GDP (WTO, 1995; WTTC 2013; UNWTO, 2018; OECD, 2018). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council Report (2019), the industry supports 319 million jobs and generates 10.4 per cent of world GDP, that is $8,8 trillion (UNWTO, 2019). Tourism growth rates are considered to be the highest in recent years (3.9 per cent in 2018), due to strong outbound demand from major source markets and a global economic upturn (UNWTO/GTERC, 2018). Tourism activity does not only benefit the industry itself, but also other economic sectors, such as trade, transport and construction (Hui et al. 2007). As a result, governments and local authorities around the world, continually intensify efforts to compete for the tourism market, realizing the importance of tourism as a significant driving force for economic growth and employment.

Tourist satisfaction, a fundamental concept in the understanding of tourist behavior, is considered to be the key to the success of the tourism industry, since it has a considerable impact on the choice of the destination for tourists, the purchase of products and services, and the potential decision to visit the destination again (Ross and Iso-Ahola, 1991; Sadeh et al., 2012; Ahmed 1991; Stevens 1992). As a consequence, tourist satisfaction is one of the most frequently studied topics in the literature of the tourism industry, due to its significance for the survival and future of tourism destinations, products and services (Gursoy et al. 2003, 2007; Naidoo et al. 2010). Nevertheless, in Greece, and more specifically in the Ionian Islands Region, one of the most visited regions in the country, a rather limited number of academic studies based directly on tourist satisfaction have been carried out (Courtis and Mylonakis, 2008). This research was therefore conducted in order to better understand the satisfaction of tourists visiting Ionian Islands, and could be useful to tourism stakeholders and regional planning authorities in retaining and improving the ranking of the Ionian Islands among Greece's most popular holiday destinations.

The Region of Ionian Islands, one of the thirteen regions of the country, consists of a group of islands situated along the western mainland coast of Greece, traditionally called the Heptanese (Eptanesa), meaning “Seven Islands”. The region is well positioned geographically, as it is close to both mainland Greece and Western Europe, and thus constitutes a convenient stepping-stone, particularly for coastal shipping traffic between Greece and Italy. The Ionian Islands, renowned for their natural beauty, long history and cultural heritage, are popular tourist destinations, being Greece's sunniest area. These factors favored the continued development of tourism, which has become the most dynamic branch of the regional economy.

Following this brief introduction, in the second section we address the concept of customer satisfaction and its relationships with perceived service quality and customer loyalty. The literature review focuses on the definition and key features of tourist satisfaction, while the section also discusses theoretical approaches and methodologies used to assess tourist satisfaction. The third section provides an outline of the study area's general and tourism profile. In the fourth section the methodology used in the research is presented, followed by the analysis of the survey results. Lastly, the conclusions and some further recommendations are summarized.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature on the market economy, much attention has been given to the definition and measurement of consumer satisfaction (Oliver and Swan, 1989; Churchil and Sutprenant, 1982; Ibrahim and Gill, 2005; and Velazquez et al., 2011). Customer satisfaction is described as a psychological term, involving the sense of well-being and pleasure resulting from receiving what one hopes for and expects from an attractive product and/or service (Vavra, 1997). When products or services exceed consumer expectations, then quality is achieved and the services are maintained by the consumer. Hence, business success is specifically measured by customer satisfaction, thus loyalty attainment. Research studies have revealed that customer satisfaction is likely to produce positive consumer behavioral outcomes such as positive word-of-mouth and repeat purchases, as well as reduced marketing costs (Barsky, 1992; Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Gursoy et al., 2003; Karatepe, 2006; Haywood 1989; Rosenberg and Czepiel 1984). Research results have also showed that if quality of the product fails to meet the purchaser's demand, the dissatisfied customer will not buy or further endorse the products, and will not return to a company, resulting in business failure.

As in the study on consumer satisfaction, academic researchers examined intensively tourist satisfaction and loyalty, since they both are the key determinants of tourism performance (Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Eusebio and Vieria, 2013). Nonetheless, the concept of tourist satisfaction is rather difficult to deal with in the tourism context, considering the “complexity” of the tourism product (Smith, 1994) and the global competition for destinations and DMOs (Destination Management Organizations).

Tourist satisfaction is described by Severt et al. (2007) as the degree to which the enjoyment of satisfaction of the tourist that emerges from the travel experience about a product or service, fulfills the desires, expectations and wishes of the tourist in association with the trip. Severt et al. (2007) suggest that customers’ satisfaction is based upon the comparison of their expectations before and after consumption. Therefore, tourists’ satisfaction is understood to be related to their pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences, and thus to have a dual causality, being related to the tourist's expectations before the trip, and to the tourist's justification after the trip on the services provided, based on the real experiences. Consequently, tourists feel satisfied when their experiences go beyond their expectations (Aliman et al. 2016).

Consumer satisfaction is therefore a post-consumption assessment (Tse and Wilton, 1988) of the product or service obtained, also explained as a function of consumer perceptions (Neal and Gursoy, 2008). Nevertheless, as Naidoo et al. (2010) indicate, it is extremely complex to understand and quantify customer perceptions, since each individual has unique perceptions. Moreover, measuring customer perceptions is even more challenging for a tourism destination, considered a complicated phenomenon that consists of a variety of tangible and intangible attributes, making it difficult to be characterized and assessed (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). Tourism destination is a complex operation of products, services and manufacturing units that provide a tourism experience to individuals or groups of people who temporarily leave their place of permanent residence and move to a destination of their choice, to satisfy their tourism needs or wishes. Tourists are now more experienced and better informed than ever before, making the selection of the destination even more complicated. This complexity is significantly increased by factors related to the characteristics of a destination (natural environment, local culture and climate, recreational facilities, hotel and restaurant services), and by subjective factors related to the preferences of the tourists themselves. In addition, the need for an integrated tourism product (Courtis and Kokotos, 2009) that values the environment, the visitor, but also the entire community, makes the exploration and measurement of tourist satisfaction of great importance for the destination's development. The main purpose of measuring and explaining customer satisfaction is to understand how well suppliers at a specific destination know and respond to their visitors' needs, and identify the elements of the destination's offer to be improved (Aliman et al., 2016).

Tourist satisfaction research is thus important for effective destination marketing due to the imperative position of customer satisfaction, because it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services, and the decision to return (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000). For these reasons, a lot of tourism research has centered on the subject, regarded by both practitioners and academics as an important research topic (Xia et al., 2009).

In the tourism literature, tourist satisfaction, was viewed either as a cognitive and emotional phenomenon (Sanchez et al., 2006), or as the result of a contrast between the appreciation of tourists for the goods and services they receive, and the expectations generated before and during the trip (Chon and Olsen, 1991; Barsky and Labagh,1992; Crosby, 1993; Bigni and Andreu, 2004). Yoon and Uysal (2005) emphasise the tourist emotional aspect on which the push and pull factors are likely to influence the tourist satisfaction formation process, where the push factor is the urge for travel and the pull factor is the destination's appeal.

In addition to this, tourist satisfaction has been linked to quality, commitment (loyalty), (Parasuraman et al., 1985), incentives for tourism (Crompton and Love, 1995), the image of a tourism destination (Chen and Hsu, 2000), the previous experience of tourists

(Konecnik and Ruzzier, 2006). Opermann (2000) argued that repeated visits and recommendations to other potential tourists are largely determined by the degree of loyalty, based upon tourist positive appraisal of goods, services and other facilities provided by destination. Anderson (1994) gave another dimension to satisfaction, seeking to examine its relationship with profit, and discovered that satisfaction directly affects profit through the mechanism of retaining customers.

The dimension of satisfaction is described in the context of Oliver's Expectancy Disconfirmation Model (Oliver, 1997), as a pleasant after-shopping experience of a product or service, given the customer's pre-purchase expectation. The disconfirmation of expectations became widely accepted as the progenitor of personal satisfaction. Tourist satisfaction is therefore defined "as the estimation that the product or service itself provides a pleasant level of feeling during the purchase - consumption or a general market assessment."

Pizam and Ellis (1999) consider that satisfaction can be classified as service satisfaction (of a particular transaction) and overall satisfaction (of a particular corporate identity). In a survey by Bou-Llumar et al. (2001), overall satisfaction was described as an intermediate variable between perceived service quality and intention to repeat the visit. Eventually, Bosque and Martin (2008) tried to explain the consumer's psychological side and linked related tourist satisfaction to the expectations, feelings and image of a tourism destination.

Tourists assess the quality of the service or product provided in relation to the satisfaction of their primary and secondary needs, where satisfaction of primary tourism needs is rather not sufficient to retain customers. More is required, particularly in satisfying secondary needs, mainly social and psychological, so travelers will be loyal to a tourism services business. Tourism businesses will have to cause customers "excitement", to exceed their expectations.

In the tourist satisfaction literature, a considerable number of theoretical and statistical models have been adapted from marketing research e.g. Kano's service quality measure model (Kano, 1984), SERVQUAL, HOLSAT, SEM (see Hassan and Shahnewaz, 2014 for an annotated bibliography). Many researchers deal with the relationship between needs and customer satisfaction based on Kano's model (Oliver 1993). The needs of customers are divided into three levels: Basic/Essential (requirements), Expected and Enthusiastic/Unexpected experiences. The expected needs are those that the customer knows, wants or intends to satisfy, but are not important to him/her, nor are they absolutely necessary. With regard to unexpected needs, the customer does not know them and is surprised when the company offers goods or services, that he/she could not possibly imagine. Within this framework, the innovative and customer-oriented companies find ground and ways to excite consumers. For example, when the customer books a room in a hotel, a basic need is to have a bed that is strewn and clean. The expected needs may include a TV, a soap and a toothbrush, while the enthusiastic needs may include fruits and a welcome card from the hotel manager.

As the degree of satisfaction of the customer depends on the level of satisfaction of the needs, the customer develops a sense of loyalty to the company. In order to maintain its customers, a company must plan, produce and deliver services on the basis of customer needs, preferences and expectations. The company must make the distinction between the essential, expected and enthusiast needs of the customers according to their goals. Failure to meet even the basic needs would likely create one-off clients who spread their negative experiences to others, multiplying the company's negative outcome.

The value of trust and commitment gained from customers is very significant, since it is generally accepted that attracting a new customer costs a company much more than retaining an existing one. A satisfied customer is very likely to use the company's services regularly and to attract new customers additionally by providing positive feedback about the business (good word of mouth). All the above refer to service-related businesses, but they can be generalized to refer to specific tourism destinations that wish to attract loyal and repeated tourism "clientele". The goal of a destination should be to create not only perceptions, but also experiences that lift each customer/tourist with a clear view of the top in the different levels of faith.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the satisfaction of tourists visiting the Ionian Islands in Greece, to identify factors influencing their satisfaction and intention to return, and their relationship. This is achieved through a research survey by use of a structured questionnaire, that explores the relationship (direct and indirect) between the variables that have been already shown to correlate with satisfaction, but also the causes that affect tourism behavior.

## SURVEY AREA

The Ionian Islands complex, scattered along the mainland Greece's western coastline, form the administrative Region of Ionian Islands, which is divided into the Regional Units of Corfu, Kefalonia, Lefkada and Zakynthos. The administrative region does not include all of the Ionian Islands, since the islands of Kythera and Antikythira, located off the southern tip of the Peloponnese, historically part of the Ionian Islands complex, are now integrated to the Region of Attica. Together with Western Greece and Peloponnese Regions, Ionian Islands Region are administered by the Patras-based Decentralized Administration of Peloponnese, Western Greece and Ionian Islands (Enterprise Greece, 2017).

The total surface of the Region is 2306.94 km², being the smallest of the thirteen regions of the country, with a population of 207,855, according to the 2011 census, 1.92 per cent of the total Greek population. The islands population has fallen in recent decades, decreased by 1.50 per cent in 2011 compared to the population in

2001, due to emigration and the decline of traditional productive activities, fishing and agriculture. Nevertheless, the region remains the third by population density with 90.1/km² nationwide, well above the national average of 81.96/km². The Region consists of 32 large and small islands. The larger and most populous islands are Kerkyra (Corfu) with a population of 104,371, followed by Zakynthos (Zante) (40,759), Kefalonia (Cephallonia) (35,801), Lefkada (Leucas) (23,693), Ithaki (Ithaca) (3,231) and Paxoi (2,300). Among the small ones are Antipaxoi, Ereikoussa, Mathraki, Othonoi, Meganisi, Kalamos, Kastos and Strofades isle group south of Zante.

Historically, the Ionian Islands played an important role, located at the crossroads of major economic and commercial routes of European and international trade linking the Western and Eastern Mediterranean with the Adriatic Sea (Kapetanakis, n.d.). In 1204 the Franks seized Constantinople and the Ionian Islands, part of the Byzantine Empire until then, were ceded to the Venetians. The centuries-long Venetian rule, preserved the Ionian Islands from becoming part of the Ottoman Empire and led to the formation of a distinct cultural identity, a local nobility with many Italian influences, whose register remained in effect as late as the 19th century. From the time of Frankish rule until 1864, when the islands became part of the modern Greek state, power changed hands a number of times. European presence on the islands, concurrently with Ottoman rule in the rest of Greece, led to significant intellectual activity that is manifested in the islands' architectural tradition and charming cultural traits (GNTO, n.d).

The Region of Ionian Islands is known for its rich landscape variety, in terms of lush vegetation and coastline geomorphology, with a length spanning roughly 8 per cent of the coastline of the entire country. The natural environment is known for its abundant fauna and flora, as well as for its biodiversity and ecosystems. In Zakynthos there is a marine park, the habitat of the world-renowned tortoise caretta-caretta, and in Kefalonia the national park of Aenos, with a particular species of fir-tree (abies cephalonica). The Corfu and

Lefkada lagoons are of great interest to environmentalists, while Kefalonia, Ithaca and Paxoi boast impressive caves, still largely unexplored. The Ionian Islands have a mild, temperate climate, seawaters as deep as they are refreshing, verdant mountains, a rich cultural heritage and a carefree spirit, a combination that makes them the ideal choice for vacation to enjoy a well-developed tourism infrastructure, hotels, restaurants, water sports centres, cultural events and numerous sights, historic monuments, and museums. Furthermore, the area's air currents have turned many of the Ionian Islands' beaches into worldwide known destinations for windsurfing. Based on the above characteristics, the major industry in the Region of Ionian Islands is tourism (Table 1).

Table 1. Region of Ionian Islands: Gross Value Added by Industry 2014

| Industry/ Sector | Gross Value Added (in million euro) | % in total GVA of the Region |
|---|---|---|
| Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing | 95 | 3.5 |
| Mining, energy, water supply and waste management | 57 | 2.1 |
| Manufacturing | 67 | 2.5 |
| Construction | 80 | 2.9 |
| Trade, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities | 1,241 | 45.7 |
| Information and Communication | 30 | 1.1 |
| Financial and Insurance activities | 72 | 2.6 |
| Real Estate activities | 463 | 17.0 |
| Scientific, administrative and support service activities | 86 | 3.2 |
| Public administration, education, health and social work activities | 402 | 14.8 |

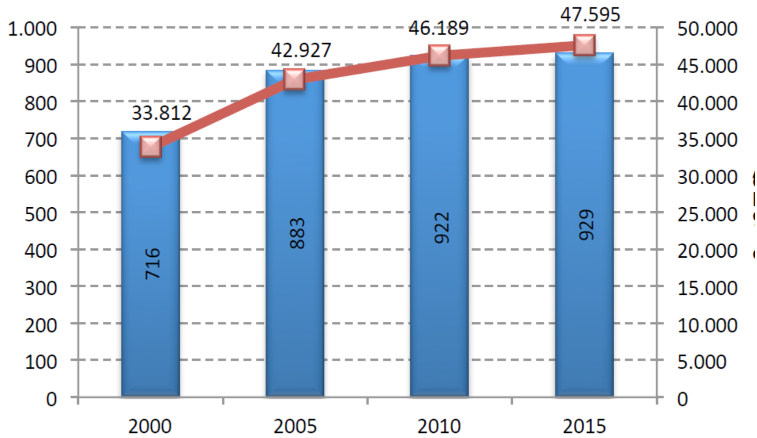
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Arts, recreation and other service activities | 124 | 4.6 |
| Total | 2,717 | 100 |

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, Enterprise Greece (2017)

The Region is served by three international airports (on Corfu, Kefalonia and Zakynthos), while mainland Aktion Airport also serves Lefkada; four Heliports (on Ithaca, Paxoi, Othoni and Ereikoussa), eighty-nine ports offering a variety of uses (Passenger, yacht shelters, fishing shelters, ports yachts etc.), two Water-Airports (on Corfu and Paxoi) and a satisfactory public road network (Enterprise Greece, 2017).

Regarding hotel capacity characteristics in the Ionian Islands, in 2015, there were 929 hotel units operating, resulting in a total capacity of 47,595 rooms and 91,480 beds, with an average capacity 51 rooms. Hotel units in the Ionian islands constitute 9.5% of the total number of hotel units in the country or about 11.6% of the total number of beds (Institute for Tourism Research and Forecasts, 2016; PwC, 2018). According to data from the register of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, from 2000 to 2015, hotel units on the Ionian islands saw a 30 per cent increase, significantly higher than the average of the country (Figure 1).

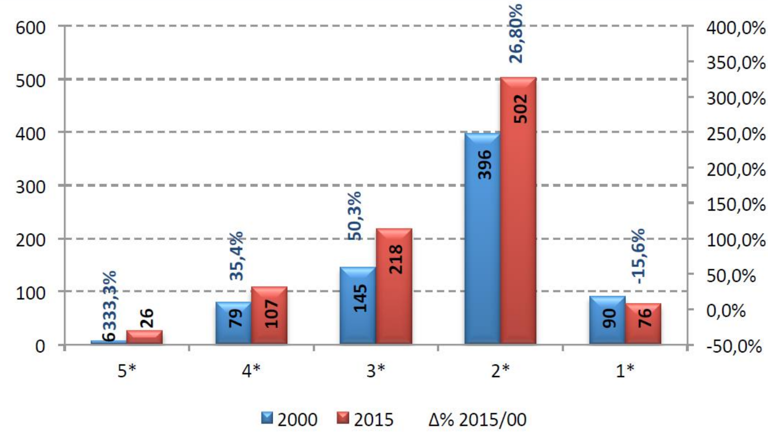
Figure 1. Ionian Islands. Hotel Unit Capacity Evolution 2000 – 2015




Source: Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, Institute for Tourism Research and Forecasts (2016)

The increase in hotel units was in tandem with a significant upgrade of their quality standard. Hotel units of the top 3 upper level hotel categories showed an increase of about 53 per cent, while hotel units of the two lower level categories a 19 per cent, a fact that explains and emphasizes the trend in the quality improvement of the hotel units and services offered. Five-star hotels reported a strong increase (+333%), though their average size fell from 223 rooms in 2000 to 156 rooms in 2015. Hotels in the two upper categories limit their size by opting to create smaller units where more standard quality, customized and personalized service can be offered (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ionian Islands. Hotel Unit Capacity Evolution per category 2000 and 2015




Source: Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, Institute for Tourism Research and Forecasts (2016)

Average room price offered in the Ionian Islands between May and August, provided with a fluctuation between 2009 and 2015. Prices increased by 13 per cent in May 2015 relative to May 2009, while the figure was 23 per cent for August.

The tourism industry is mostly seasonal, with the majority of hotels in the islands operating seven months from late March to late October, with the peak in mid-July/August, traditionally the busiest summer vacation period in Greece. Seasonal activity of hotel units on the Ionian Islands, following overnight seasonality, was very high in 2015 and rised up to 77%, significantly higher than the country's average of 55 per cent. Various efforts have been made towards the extension of the seasonality of the destinations' visitation, ideally on a year-round basis in the longer term.

In 2010 the airports of Zakynthos, Corfu and Kefalonia recorded 18.5 per cent of total airport foreign tourist arrivals, and were ranked among the top ten in Greece by number of international arrivals, with 1,386,289 international arrivals for 2012. During the 2010-2015 period, non-domestic arrivals increased 50 per cent at Corfu airport, 46 per cent at Kefalonia airport and 44 per cent at

Zakynthos airport, with Corfu airport recording almost two million arrivals in 2018 (Tavladorakis and Papadimitriou, 2019).

Total arrivals (2,008,895) and overnight stays (19,081,221) represent 8.1 per cent and 10.3 per cent of the total country's arrivals (22,033,468) and overnights (184,788,605), reflecting a rise in 2014 relative to 2013 (12.4 per cent and 11.7 per cent, respectively), which is smaller than the increase recorded in the overall country (23 per cent and 15.3 per cent respectively) (Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, Institute for Tourism Research and Forecasts, 2016).

Regarding the country of origin of tourists, 98% of Ionian islands airport arrivals in 2015 came from Europe. 79 per cent of arrivals in the Ionian Islands Region were registered by travelers claiming that they are EU countries permanent residents, whereas the corresponding percentage for the country as a whole was 60.1 per cent.

According to the countries of origin of the traveler, the highest shares on arrivals and overnight stays in the region are travelers from the UK by 31.9 per cent, while travelers from Germany represent 9.5 per cent followed by Italy, Russia, Poland and France. Travelers from the UK have the biggest share of spending followed by those from Germany, Russia, Italy, France and Poland (Table 2). First position on spending per visit keep travelers from Russia (861,4 euro), second from Germany (797 euro), third from the UK (731,8 euro), fourth from France (679,6 euro), fifth from Italy (556,2 euro) and sixth from Poland (457,1 euro).

Table 2. Incoming Tourism Statistical data of Ionian Island Region per country of origin, 2014

| Region of Ionian Islands | UK | Germany | Italy | Russia | Poland | France |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arrivals share | 31.9 % | 9.5% | 8.3% | 7.0% | 5.8% | 5.1% |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overnights share | 32.9 % | 9.6% | 8.5% | 8.1% | 5.2% | 4.7% |
| Expenditure share | 34.7 % | 11.3% | 6.9% | 9.0% | 3.9% | 5.2% |
| Expenditure per visit | 731,8 € | 797,0€ | 556,2 € | 861,4 € | 457,1 € | 679,6 € |
| Expenditure per overnight stay | 74,7€ | 83,1€ | 57,0€ | 79,2€ | 53,7€ | 77,3€ |
| Days of stay | 9,8 | 9,6 | 9,8 | 10,9 | 8,5 | 8,8 |

Source: Bank of Greece, Border Survey, Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, processed by Institute for Tourism Research and Forecasts (2016)

In 2015, 36 per cent of British tourists visiting Greece landed on the Ionian islands, as well as 64 per cent of tourists coming from Malta. Ionian islands make up a popular destination also for Croatian tourists whose share in 2015 reached as high as 40 per cent. Tourists from the United Kingdom have the larger share of non-domestic airport arrivals in all three airports in 2015 (Zakynthos: 48 per cent, Corfu: 32 per cent, Kefalonia: 69 per cent). For Zakynthos, second come tourists from Poland (13 per cent) and third from the Netherlands (7 per cent), for Kefalonia, second come tourists from Italy (9 per cent) and third from the Netherlands (7 per cent). Finally, for Corfu, in 2018, second come tourists from Germany (15 per cent) and third from Poland (6 per cent) (Tavladorakis and Papadimitriou, 2019). Based on the recorded airport arrivals, United Kingdom and Germany are by far the dominant markets for visitation, with Poland being the only other country with notable presence.

Tourism expenditure in the Region reached a total of 1,35 billion euro in 2014, 10.4% per cent of the country's total incoming tourism expenditure, representing an increase of 14.5 per cent compared to the previous year. Expenditure per visit of tourists to the Ionian

Islands Region is 672,1 euro, which is 13.9 per cent higher than the total of 590,2 euro for the country. On the other hand, expenditure per overnight stay in the Ionian Islands Region is 70,8 euro, while visitor stay are about 9,5 days. In relation to the other twelve regions of the country, the Region of the Ionian Islands, is listed fifth (5th) on arrivals, overnight stay and expenses, third (3rd) on expenses per visit, fourth (4th) on expenses per overnight stay and second (2nd) on stay days.

## METHODOLOGY

In the measurement of tourism service satisfaction, various simple and complex statistical methods are used such as, descriptive statistics (Yu and Goulden, 2006), ANOVA test (Vogt and Andereck, 2003), Factor Analysis (Eusebio and Vieira, 2013), Principal Component Analysis (Huang and Hsu, 2009) and Regression Analysis (O'Neill et al., 2010). In this paper, multivariate techniques were used to examine the relationship between several variables referring to demographic characteristics and tourist satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, a one-way between subjects Analysis of Variance was conducted to compare the effect of various demographic characteristics on tourist satisfaction and tourism loyalty. The aim is to detect the degree of correlation between various factors.

The data for the study were collected by means of a questionnaire survey using self-administrated questionnaires distributed to tourists at popular sites during the peak tourist period, May 1st and October 31st 2012, in the four larger Ionian islands namely, Corfu, Kefalonia, Zakynthos and Lefkada. Tourists were asked to complete the questionnaire while waiting in the departure areas of the airport, relaxing in hotels and other accommodation lounges, dining in restaurants and in entertainment venues. Out of the 1,200 questionnaires distributed, 915 were found to be of use for the study, representing a response rate of 76 per cent.

To ensure content validity, a pilot test was carried out before the final version of the survey questionnaire, addressed to 191 visitors of all nationalities that visited the island of Kefalonia in 2011, in an attempt to ensure a consistent flow of questions. The pilot test questionnaire contained variables adapted from relevant tourism literature (Eusebio and Vieira, 2013; Song et al. 2011), and lasted between 10 to 15 minutes. The purpose of the pilot survey was to evaluate the questionnaire format, in order to avoid ambiguity of the selected variables included in the survey, and to make the necessary modifications and adjustments to the final version of the questionnaire. After getting feedback from the pilot survey, the questionnaire was revised and the final version of the questionnaire was released, including the most significant variables that suit to the research needs (Eusebio and Vieira, 2013).

The structured questionnaire consisted of two parts and was delivered in two languages, English and Greek. The first part included close-ended questions for collecting data on socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (age, gender, marital status, geographic origin, education, income and employment status). In the second part, tourists were asked several questions to indicate their degree of satisfaction regarding their vacation. The aim of this research was to draw conclusions about the formation of tourist satisfaction and the description of the relationships that shape tourist satisfaction. To that end, descriptive statistics, and multivariate analysis techniques were selected. For the purpose of the analysis, the statistical package S.P.S.S. v 17.0 was used.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this section the outcome of research as resulted from the statistical analysis of the data collected is presented. In the first part of the section some descriptive statistics for the data collected are analysed, while at the second part further analysis of the data using multivariate techniques is provided.

**Sample Sociodemographic Characteristics**

In this part, tourist demographic characteristics such as age, gender, nationality, socio-economic background (income, marital status, occupation, educational level) and travel behavioral patterns are examined. The analysis of the data collected using the questionnaire that was properly designed for the purposes of this research, reveals the following:

The survey results about the demographic and socioeconomic data of the respondents show that the majority of visitors (48.8 per cent of the respondents) in the study area were rather “mature” tourists, within a range between 35-54 years old. Regarding gender, 55.1 per cent of the respondents were female and 44.9% were male. In reference to the family status, 59.6 per cent of the respondents were married, while 27.5 per cent had no family commitments. The survey identified that family and friends were customary groups during holidays. Among the respondents, 35.7 per cent were accompanied by family members and 34.6 per cent came with a companion or friends. Thus, only a very small percentage of tourists were travelling alone. It is worth mentioning that the education level of tourists was significantly high, with an impressive rate of 59.2 per cent of respondents having university degree.

Considering the country of origin, the largest segment were from the United Kingdom (45.2 per cent of the respondents), followed by Greeks (19.6 per cent) and other European countries 29.4 per cent, while only a small percentage (5.2 per cent) were from America, Africa and Australia. The length of stay for the majority of tourists (45 per cent of the respondents) was 7 days, followed by a percentage of 20 per cent who stayed for a longer period of 14 days. The majority of the respondents stayed in a hotel (53.7 per cent of the respondents), while a significant percentage of 30.2 per cent stayed in non-hotel accommodation such as flats and rooms to rent.

The study results reveal that an overwhelming percentage of 60.1 per cent of respondents were usually on vacation during summer holidays and only 29.7% per cent all year around. The study results also reveal that only 10.4 per cent of respondents had already visited another tourism destination during the year, leaving the vast majority of 89.6 per cent visiting only one destination per year.

One out of four tourists were repeat visitors that had visited the Ionian islands again in the past, while 30 per cent of the respondents were very much satisfied, so that they intend to repeat their visit. The cost of the holidays for the largest proportion of 54.8 per cent of the respondents range between 1000-3000 euros. 30.6 per cent spend up to 1000 euro during their holidays and only a small percentage of about 11.5 per cent have the opportunity to spend more than 3000 euros. For the majority of tourists 54.1 per cent, the trip to Ionian islands was up to 3 hours flight from their place of origin. The members of the group of respondents 'Very-Satisfied', have the average of 7.12 in the range of loyalty-commitment (6.19 is the average of the whole sample). On the other hand, the members of the 'Moderate-Satisfied' group of respondents have a mean of 5.81 on the scale of commitment. That is, it is observed that those excited with the place and holidays are 22 per cent more willing to repeat their visit. Similarly, those that are satisfied have 15 per cent fewer complaints, and 5 per cent more interest to learn about the place they visit, seeking and looking at different sources of information.

## Tourist Satisfaction And Loyalty

Following the analysis of the sample's characteristics and in order to detect the degree of correlation between various demographic characteristics and tourist satisfaction and loyalty, inferential statistics were used.

More specifically, one-way between subjects Analysis of Variance was conducted to test the effect of the demographic characteristics on tourist satisfaction (Table 3) and tourist Loyalty (Table 4). In addition, Pearson correlation was used to test the correlation of tourist satisfaction and loyalty with the motivation of tourists (Table 5), with the characteristics of destination (Table 7), the perceived value of the main components of tourism product (Table 8), perceived performance for every element of tourism destination (Table 9), the characteristics of the vacation (Table 10). Finally, Pearson correlation was used to test the correlation between satisfaction and loyalty (Table 11).

Regarding the effect of sample characteristics on Tourist satisfaction (Table 3), we conclude that the effect of gender, (F=3.836, p=0.05), composition of the group, (F=2.122, p=0.121), type of group, (F=0.250, p=0.910), and number of vacations, (F=3.355, p=0.067) on tourist satisfaction was non-significant.

Table 3: ANOVA Table of the effect of sample characteristics on Tourist satisfaction

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country of origin | 88,078 | 3 | 29,359 | 13,147 | ,000 |
| Gender | 8,911 | 1 | 8,911 | 3,836 | ,050 |
| Family status | 15,754 | 2 | 7,877 | 3,478 | ,031 |
| Age | 20,970 | 2 | 10,485 | 4,499 | ,011 |
| Education level | 28,588 | 3 | 9,529 | 4,163 | ,006 |
| Type of Accommodation | 22,173 | 4 | 5,543 | 2,389 | ,049 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Composition of group | 10,250 | 2 | 5,125 | 2,122 | ,121 |
| Type of group | 2,323 | 4 | ,581 | ,250 | ,910 |
| Season of holidays | 22,236 | 3 | 7,412 | 3,198 | ,023 |
| Number of vacations | 7,775 | 1 | 7,775 | 3,355 | ,067 |

On the other hand, all other variables have a significant effect on tourist satisfaction. More specifically,

- the country of origin has a significant effect on tourist satisfaction at the $p<0.05$ level ($F=13.147$, $p=0.000$). It appears that British are the most satisfied tourists, which is also signaled by the fact that they choose all-inclusive packages.

- Family status has a significant effect on tourist satisfaction at the $p<0.05$ level ($F=3.478$, $p=0.031$). It seems that people that are within a family relationship seem to be more satisfied than the others.

- Age has a significant effect on tourist satisfaction at the $p<0.05$ level ($F=4.499$, $p=0.011$). It can be noticed that older travelers (over 55 years) appear to be more satisfied than younger travelers.

- Education level has a significant effect on tourist satisfaction at the $p<0.05$ level ($F=4.163$, $p=0.006$). According to the findings, people of high level of education are more satisfied. This can be explained by the fact that they usually know what they want to see and they have already gathered adequate information about the specific tourism destinations.

- Type of accommodation has a significant effect on tourist satisfaction at the p<0.05 level (F=2.389, p=0.049). According to the findings, it seems that those who choose to stay in rooms to rent are more satisfied. This can be explained by the fact that although this type of accommodation is cheaper than other types of accommodation the quality of service is competent.

- Finally, the season of the holidays has a significant effect on tourist satisfaction at the p<0.05 level (F=3.198, p=0.023). It appears that tourists who prefer all year holidays are the most satisfied ones.

Regarding the effect of the demographic characteristics on Tourist Loyalty (Table 4), based on the above table, the effect of gender, (F=0.721, p=0.396), family status, (F=1.952, p=0.143), education level, (F=1.946, p=0.1210), composition of the group (F=1.557, p=212), season of holidays (F=0.112, p=0.953) and number of vacations, (F=0.053, p=0.817) on tourist satisfaction was non-significant.

Table 4: ANOVA Table of the effect of sample characteristics on Tourism Loyalty

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country of origin | 127,886 | 3 | 42,629 | 5,745 | ,001 |
| Gender | 5,440 | 1 | 5,440 | ,721 | ,396 |
| Family status | 29,449 | 2 | 14,725 | 1,952 | ,143 |
| Age | 162,593 | 2 | 81,297 | 10,924 | ,000 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Education level | 43,185 | 3 | 14,395 | 1,946 | ,121 |
| Type of Accommodation | 179,378 | 4 | 44,845 | 6,089 | ,000 |
| Composition of group | 23,710 | 2 | 11,855 | 1,557 | ,212 |
| Type of group | 86,810 | 4 | 21,702 | 2,927 | ,020 |
| Season of holidays | 2,533 | 3 | ,844 | ,112 | ,953 |
| Number of vacations | ,403 | 1 | ,403 | ,053 | ,817 |

On the other hand, all other variables have a significant effect on Tourism Loyalty. More specifically,

- the country of origin has a significant effect on loyalty at the $p<0.05$ level ($F=5.745$, $p=0.001$). This means that travelers from countries outside Europe show their loyalty to the specific tourist destinations. This is explained by the fact that those tourists usually stay for free to family members on those destinations.

- Age has a significant effect on loyalty at the $p<0.05$ level ($F=10.924$, $p=0.000$). It appears that older travelers (over 55 years) show to be more loyal than younger travelers because they are settled in their preferences.

- Type of accommodation has a significant effect on loyalty at the $p<0.05$ level ($F=6.089$, $p=0.000$). This means that those who choose to stay in rooms to rent are more loyal. This can be explained by the fact that this type of accommodation is cheaper than other types of accommodation but the quality of service is competent.

- Finally, the type of group has a significant effect on loyalty at the $p<0.05$ level ($F=2.927$, $p=0.020$) and this can be explained by the fact that people traveling with family are accustomed to the destination environment and tend to visit the destination again.

In order to test the correlation of tourist satisfaction and loyalty with the motivation of tourists expressed by their preferences on tourism destinations, the ten factors of motivation with the highest importance as it has been derived from the survey were used (Table 5).

Table 5: Correlation analysis for motivation and tourist satisfaction and loyalty

| | Pearson Correlation | | Sig. (2-tailed) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Motivation | Satisfaction | Loyalty | Satisfaction | Loyalty |
| Destination | ,070 | ,009 | **,034** | ,775 |
| Friends | ,031 | -,101 | ,345 | **,002** |
| Shopping | -,002 | -,007 | ,961 | ,843 |
| Local gastronomy | ,132 | ,059 | **,000** | **,072** |
| Nonprogramming | -,031 | -,056 | ,345 | ,090 |
| New cultures | ,053 | -,045 | ,112 | ,171 |
| Activities | -,022 | ,013 | ,510 | ,687 |
| Knowing new people | ,087 | ,010 | **,009** | ,774 |
| Fun | ,060 | ,020 | ,072 | ,539 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Organised vacations | -,004 | ,091 | ,913 | **,006** |

According to the above results there was a positive weak correlation between tourist satisfaction and destination (r = 0.07, p = 0.034), local gastronomy (r = 0.132, p = 0.000), knowing new people (r = 0.087, p = 0.009). In addition, there was a positive weak correlation between loyalty and organized vacations (r = 0.091, p = 0.006) and a negative correlation between loyalty and friends (r = -0.101, p = 0.002). The planning and organization of holidays reveals a conscious tourist.

The characteristics of tourism destinations play an important role on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The classification of those characteristics according to their importance and the reasons for choosing them is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Classification of the characteristics of tourism destinations

| Code name | Description |
|---|---|
| Sports | Allow tourists to get involved in sports |
| Sightseeing | The destination offers places to visit/see |
| Extreme sports | Allow tourists to have extreme sports |
| Excursions | Allow tourists to take part to excursions |
| Entertainment | The destination has places for entertainment |
| Art | The destination has art objects |

| | |
|---|---|
| Archaeological places | The destination has archaeological places |
| Folklore | Tourists visit places with intense folklore |
| Shopping | There is shopping areas |
| Tourist_information | There are organized tourism information offices |
| Fun | Tousists have fun |

The analysis of the correlation (Table 7) show that there was a positive correlation between tourist satisfaction and sports (r = 0.107, p = 0.001), sightseeing (r = 0.147, p = 0.000) and fun (r = 0.159, p = 0.000). In addition, there was a positive correlation between loyalty and sports (r = 0.141, p = 0.000), sightseeing (r = 0.095, p = 0.004), extreme sports (r = 0.094, p = 0.005) excursions (r = 0.066, p = 0.047), entertainment (r = 0.072, p = 0.031), art (r = 0.079, p = 0.017), archaeological places (r = 0.067, p = 0.044) and folcore (r = 0.144, p = 0.000).

Table 7: Correlation analysis for the characteristics of destination

| | Pearson Correlation | | Sig. (2-tailed) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Characteristics of destination | Satisfaction | Loyalty | Satisfaction | Loyalty |
| Sports | ,107 | ,141 | ,001 | ,000 |
| Sightseeing | ,147 | ,095 | ,000 | ,004 |
| Extreme sports | -,042 | ,094 | ,205 | ,005 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Excursions | ,034 | ,066 | ,305 | ,047 |
| Entertainment | ,016 | ,072 | ,623 | ,031 |
| Art | -,035 | ,079 | ,293 | ,017 |
| Archaeological places | ,008 | ,067 | ,800 | ,044 |
| Folcore | ,024 | ,144 | ,473 | ,000 |
| Shopping | -,011 | ,002 | ,731 | ,952 |
| Tourist_info | -,055 | -,018 | ,099 | ,583 |
| Fun | ,159 | ,023 | ,000 | ,482 |

This analysis shows that tourist satisfaction is mainly related to activities which relate to recreation and fun, nature and sport. In addition, the destination's attractions are evaluated to be equally important for satisfaction. On the other hand, art, the acquaintance with the culture of the destination and shopping, do not seem to affect satisfaction. Concerning loyalty, shopping, tourist information offices and fun do not correlate to loyalty.

Regarding the correlation between tourist satisfaction and loyalty with the perceived value of the main components of tourism product (Table 8), results show that there is significant correlation between tourist satisfaction and loyalty and accommodation, service, transportation, comparison to other destinations. This implies that if the specific destination is better than others in terms of facilities, it will attract more tourists.

Table 8: Correlation analysis for the main components of tourism product

| Components of tourism product | Pearson Correlation | | Sig. (2-tailed) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Satisfaction | Loyalty | Satisfaction | Loyalty |
| The visit to the place | ,332 | ,203 | ,000 | ,000 |
| Accommodation | ,358 | ,167 | ,000 | ,000 |
| Transportation | ,395 | ,184 | ,000 | ,000 |
| Service | ,350 | ,178 | ,000 | ,000 |
| Comparing to other places | ,349 | ,227 | ,000 | ,000 |

As for the correlation between tourist satisfaction and loyalty with perceived performance (Table 9), results show that there is significant correlation between tourist satisfaction and loyalty and perceived performance for every element of tourism destination.

Table 9: Correlation analysis for the perceived performance

| | Pearson Correlation | | Sig. (2-tailed) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Satisfaction | Loyalty | Satisfaction | Loyalty |
| Stay | ,505 | ,230 | ,000 | ,000 |
| Food | ,498 | ,151 | ,000 | ,000 |
| Transport | ,410 | ,066 | ,000 | ,046 |
| Entertainment | ,473 | ,142 | ,000 | ,000 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Infrastructure | ,438 | ,127 | ,000 | ,000 |
| Perceived Performance | ,624 | ,195 | ,000 | ,000 |

Regarding the correlation between tourist satisfaction and loyalty and the characteristics of vacation (Table 10) the analysis shows that there is no significant correlation between tourist satisfaction and loyalty and the money spend on vacation. On the other hand, there is a positive correlation between tourist satisfaction and personal activities (r = 0.177, p = 0.007), and activities on the place (r = 0.067, p = 0.043). In addition, there is a positive correlation between loyalty and exploring the place (r = 0.092, p = 0.005).

Table 10: Correlation analysis for the characteristics of vacation

| | Pearson Correlation | | Sig. (2-tailed) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Characteristics of vacation | Satisfaction | Loyalty | Satisfaction | Loyalty |
| Budget | ,017 | ,018 | ,605 | ,599 |
| Duration of the trip | -,002 | -,038 | ,968 | ,329 |
| Nights spend | ,057 | ,055 | ,110 | ,118 |
| Personal activities (eat, fun, friends) | ,177 | ,004 | ,000 | ,911 |
| Activities on the place | ,067 | ,000 | ,043 | ,997 |
| Exporing the place | -,004 | ,092 | ,902 | ,005 |

Finally, regarding correlation between tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Table 11) the analysis show that there is a positive correlation between tourist satisfaction and loyalty which is significant, (r=0.266, p=0.000). This implies that tourists that are satisfied with a destination are loyal to it and that they will revisit it.

Table 11: Correlation analysis for satisfaction and loyalty

| | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|
| | Satisfaction | |
| Loyalty | ,266 | ,000 |

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## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research aimed at providing an overall understanding of foreign tourists and tourism industry in the Ionian Islands Region as well as assessing the tourist satisfaction with the destination and their intention to return. These goals were accomplished by careful research and the identification of factors that ultimately directly and indirectly influence the return intention of tourists.

After analyzing all data from the tourists who spent time doing the survey, some significant conclusions are drawn from the study. Firstly we can conclude that, the most important among the various variables affecting tourist satisfaction, is whether tourists travel alone or in groups. The survey results analysis reveals that tourists traveling in a group of 3-4 people are more satisfied and likely willing to revisit the place, while tourists travelling alone are less satisfied. In addition, tourists traveling for leisure purposes, to explore new places, to taste local gastronomy and meet new people are more satisfied.

Another finding is that satisfaction is mainly affected by behavior and features related to the personal interests of tourists, the so-called 'active activities' (food, fun, hanging out with friends, sports, etc.). On the other hand, loyalty is influenced by behavior and features related to tourist destinations, like touring, sightseeing, folklore elements, etc. Moreover, estimated value (value for money) for the tourist product being offered, is the second most important factor affecting the overall satisfaction and loyalty assessment.

A third point of interest is that, there is a positive relationship between commitment (loyalty) and satisfaction. This does not mean that tourists who found themselves very satisfied will choose the same destination for their next holidays. On the contrary, it is observed that people who say "excited" or even moderately satisfied with their vacations are more likely to revisit the place again. People who are very satisfied will choose a different destination for their vacations.

A fourth finding of the research, is that the profile of those who declare their intention to revisit the place and those who have already revisited the place is very similar, indicating the proximity/similarity of behaviors. Tourism experience has a very powerful influence on visitor behavior. Especially the satisfaction from the residents of tourism destinations, a smooth relationship with the local tourism professionals, providing the basic conditions for the overall satisfaction assessment, and the satisfaction from the local authorities and local government, create the prerequisite for the intention of repeating the visit.

Another interesting point is that tourists that tend to visit a place again, have specific preferences, such as sports, shopping, entertainment, and they schedule and organize their vacations. They appear to slowly develop a customary and non-temporal relationship with the destination.

Finally, results analysis shows that the amount of holiday expenditure is not a sufficient factor that can affect satisfaction. The lack of coordinated and adequate information is noticeable and is being sought by people who intend to repeat the visit.

Based on the results of the research and in order to enhance tourist satisfaction and the intention to repeat the visit, the following recommendations are made for the survey area, that could be of use for future research on related topics:

- Development and improvement of the public and private sector overall infrastructure (improvement of road network, public services, preservation and promotion of archaeological and historical sites).
- Creation of thematic routes (religious, cultural, agro-tourism, diving). Organization of educational, folkloric and cultural events, getting to know local products and enhancing sports activities.
- Maintenance of the quality / price ratio at acceptable levels, with the introduction of quality assurance systems and the appropriate tourism education. Actions to inform, encourage and educate visitors (publication of an annual tourism services guide, creation of an attractive website, establishment of a tourism information office, placement of city maps or screens (touch screen), new road signs, creation of exhibits to promote local products).
- Lastly, efforts should be made to retain the customer (by offering smart holiday packages, boosting synergies among tourism stakeholders and local authorities, by maintaining the quality-price ratio at affordable levels)

This research generated a wealth of information on the tourist satisfaction in the Region of Ionian Islands, Greece and their intention to return. Nevertheless, the current study has some limitations especially about the sample size and time frame. Furthermore, future research on the tourist satisfaction should also consider social media communication and the online reviews on travel and booking sites (e.g. TripAdvisor), that express the satisfaction of tourists about a destination and are becoming increasingly popular sources of information for trip planning in recent years.

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